

A VERY SUBSTANTIAL GHOST.

BY MATTIE DYER BRITTS.

ONE evening, I went home to my wife with some wonderful news. I had just learned from the lawyers that an old uncle of ours, over in Jersey, from whom we never expected a dollar, was dead, and had left us the bulk of his property, including the country-house where he died.

There was another nephew who had always lived with Uncle Si, and expected to be his heir; but he was a thoroughly bad fellow, given to all sorts of evil ways, and the old man, after trying in vain to reform the sinner, cut him off with a few hundred dollars, and, to our great surprise, made me the heir.

When I reached home and told Sue, she could hardly believe the good news.

"Oh, Charley!" she cried, "if it is true, we can stop this endless paying rent, and have a home of our own at last!"

"It certainly is true," I replied. "I've gone over all the business with White and Humphreys, and we can take possession of our country-seat as soon as we like. There is only one small drawback."

"No rose without a thorn," quoted Sue, laughingly. "Well, what is it, Charley?"

"It's a ghost, my dear!"

"A ghost? What do you mean?"

"There's a report that the house is haunted."

"Haunted? Nonsense!"

"The neighbors declare that, ever since Uncle Si died, strange lights have been seen in the house, odd noises heard, and a white-robed ghost known to wander about the premises."

"How absurd!" cried Sue.

"You know I can't give up my city business, and, if we do go there to live, you and Sarah will be left much alone, and—"

"I'll answer for Sarah," declared Sue, interrupting me without the least regard for courtesy. "She is not afraid of the world, the flesh, nor the—other fellow! Neither am I, when she's around."

Sarah was our servant, a grim old maid from 'way down East, ugly as sin, but possessing all the spirit and energy of her stout-hearted progenitors.

"I don't doubt Sarah's ability to scare anything mortal," I remarked, dryly. "But, when it comes to a ghost—"

(278)

"When will you take me to see the place?" inquired Sue, interrupting me without mercy a second time, and not condescending to notice my observation.

"Whenever you please. To-morrow, if you like," I answered.

"The sooner the better," decided Sue. "We'll go to-morrow."

So, over to Jersey we went, the next day, and drove out to our new inheritance. It was really a fine property, but sadly out of repair. We concluded to take possession at once, and, on our way home, stopped in the village near by to engage workmen to put things in order.

We heard stories of the ghost from all of them. One said he wouldn't live there if they'd give him the farm; another refused to go at all unless he had company; and the third was sure that bad luck would attend anybody who tried to stay in that house.

I was rather sorry that Sue should hear all this; but she, like a sensible girl, advised that we should not be influenced by any such silly stories. Besides, she added, if these things really were seen and heard, there must be some natural cause for them, which we would try to discover and put an end to.

I praised her for being such a brave little soul, and promised to buy her a revolver with which to defend herself. "I don't know that you could shoot a ghost, if you saw one," I laughingly remarked, "but it will be handy to have, anyhow."

"I will use it, rest assured, if his ghostship appears to me!" returned Sue, in the same spirit.

Just as we drove away from the shop where we had engaged a carpenter, a well-dressed man with a handsome wicked face passed by, and gave me such a scowl, as he glanced at me, that I asked Mr. Jackson who he was.

"That's your rival, the nephew old Si Hascomb threw over," he answered. "Joe Hascomb is a hard case. I'm afraid you'll find him your enemy when you come here!"

"But it's no fault of ours that he lost the property. I shall not interfere with him unless he bothers me; in which case, he'll be apt to wish he hadn't."

"Charley, I'm afraid he will do you some

harm," said Sue, anxiously, as we drove on. "He has such a wicked countenance."

"Nonsense!" I replied, laughing at her fears. "Why, you dread him more than the ghost!"

"Oh, yes, indeed I do!" cried Sue. "A bad man is something tangible, and a ghost isn't, you see."

"We're in no danger from this one," I returned. But I believed, myself, that, if ever that fellow found a chance to injure us, he would do it. And it was more the recollection of his evil face, than any thought of the ghost, which made me keep my laughing promise to buy Sue the revolver. One didn't know what might happen, and I was sure, if it became necessary to use it, she would do so.

The workmen had the house ready for us very soon, and we went into our new quarters quite merrily, despite the ghost. For a few days, nothing disturbed us. Then, one night, the lights appeared and the noises began. We saw flashes of light at several windows and heard groans and cries; but the most rapid and thorough search could not discover their source.

One evening, as Sue and I came home rather late, we distinctly saw a white figure in the path before us; but it vanished when we drew near. Sarah saw the same figure twice—once at the front door, once at the corner of the woodshed; all three of us saw it looking in at the dining-room window, as we sat at supper, one night; but, when we rushed out, we were only greeted by a hollow mocking "Ha! ha!" as if the ghost were deriding our futile efforts to catch him.

I expected to hear Sue ask to go back to the city; but, when I ventured one day to say so to her, the plucky little woman declared that she was not going to be driven from a lovely home by his ghostship: but, if he wanted to wander about for amusement, he had her permission to do so to his entire content.

"You're a jewel, Susie, my dear," said I. "But I wish we could get at the bottom of this business."

That, however, we could not do. It was impossible that any of the neighbors could be playing us tricks; indeed, no one could have a motive for disturbing us, unless it were the man whom the uncle had disinherited—and he had left the neighborhood just before we moved. There seemed to be nothing to do except to bide our time and wait until the mystery had an

end of some kind—as, in the nature of things, it would have before a great while.

One evening, when matters had been unusually quiet for several days, Sue and I were chatting, seated in our cozy sitting-room, when she chanced to remember some orders which she had forgotten to give Sarah at suppertime.

Sarah was finishing her ironing in the laundry, a small building a short distance from the dwelling. Sue threw a zephyr scarf over her head and ran across the yard without a thought of fear.

She had hardly been gone a moment, when I was startled by the report of a pistol, then a groan and a heavy fall. I sprang up and rushed out, calling in alarm:

"Sue! Sue! Are you hurt? Where are you?"

"Here!" promptly responded her clear voice. And I flew toward her, just as Sarah came running from the laundry with a light.

"What is it, Sue? What has happened?" I demanded, quickly.

"Nothing; only I've shot the ghost," exclaimed Sue, coolly. "It came upon me, right in my face, as I was coming back from the laundry, and I fired before I thought."

"You did just right!" I cried. "Here, Sarah—bring your light."

As Sarah came near, I stooped over the white-robed figure lying at Sue's feet, pulled aside the disguising drapery, and revealed the wicked face of our enemy—Joe Hascomb!

We carried him to an upper room and laid him on the bed; the two women watched beside him, while I rode for a doctor. His wound did not prove serious, at which we rejoiced, but he had a tedious fever, through which we nursed him faithfully.

He rose from that bed a changed man. He confessed himself the author of all the late disturbance: being determined that, if he lost the property, we at least should not enjoy it.

Having his own keys and a perfect knowledge of every nook and corner of his old home, a little ingenuity made the rest easy to him. When he got well, we offered him a thousand dollars with which to begin a new life. He thankfully accepted it, and went away. We have never heard of him since, nor had any disturbance about our home: so we conclude the "ghost" is "laid" forever, and we may live in peace.

BESSIE'S INTERFERENCE.

BY GEORGIA GRANT.



no use talking about that—I simply won't. Red-haired, freckled, one hundred and seventy-five if she's a pound! Never!"

The speaker, who, in his excitement, had uttered the above indignant soliloquy aloud, was a youth of three or four and twenty; a rather good-looking young fellow in habiliments of unexceptionable cut. He paced up and down the solitary corner of the old-fashioned garden, wearing an air of extreme dejection. His usually jaunty manner had quite vanished—his best friend would hardly have recognized him under this new aspect, for he was ordinarily the blithest of mortals.

"Now, if she'd been even tolerably good-looking," groaned Tom, "I might have screwed my courage up to marrying her for the sake of the money, though the idea of a wife ready-furnished isn't agreeable. Yes," continued he, still aloud, secure in the solitude of his retreat among apple-trees and sweet-scented flowers, "if uncle will undertake to find me a decent-looking heiress, I'll marry her, provided she'll have me."

While soliloquizing in this Hamlet-like fashion, Master Tom had no thought of spectators, and had assumed an attitude more negligent than graceful. As an aid to reflection, he had placed one hand in his coat-pocket, the other behind his back, while he reviewed the unpleasant situation in every possible aspect, and tried to think of

ONFOUND it all—it's hard lines for a fellow to be brought up short in this way!" exclaimed Tom Sinclair. "But I can't marry the Mac-Duffy—there's

some way out of his dilemma. No idea occurring to him, he finally lighted a cigar and pursued his saunter in silence. When the weed was half finished, however, he threw it away in his usual extravagant fashion (Truly, Master Tom, you ought to marry an heiress) and turned to enter the house, a large old-fashioned stone dwelling, overrun with vines and surrounded by a blaze of roses, peonies, and hollyhocks. He sighed as he walked along the wide hall passing through the centre, and knocked at the library-door. A vision of leaving the home which had been his from boyhood crossed his mind with a sharp pang of regret.

In response to Tom's rap, a stern voice answered "Come in," and, a moment later, he was again facing his uncle, from whom he had parted a little while before in anger.

Thomas Sinclair, senior, sat at his writing-desk, busily engaged in looking over some papers, and he glanced up with a slight frown as his nephew entered. He was a dry withered old man, his appearance distinctly suggestive of the parchments among which his life had been spent, for he was a lawyer.

"Well, sir," he addressed the intruder, "have you come to tell me you've changed your mind, and concluded to do what I wish you to?" As he spoke, a grim smile flitted over his wrinkled face; for the only soft spot in his heart was his affection for this orphan nephew, whom he had educated and provided for since the death of the boy's parents. He could not believe that his favorite would thwart him.

But Tom answered very decidedly, though gently:

"No, sir, I have come to say that there is no possibility of my changing my mind. I cannot marry Miss MacDuffy. If you have really resolved to disown me, you may as well do so at once."

The old man's storm of anger had subsided, and he was perfectly quiet; but his countenance darkened.

"I shall not accept your decision now—I will still give you time to reconsider your resolution. If at the end of two months you prove still determined—why, then so shall I be. In the meanwhile, I would advise you to remain here and think over the matter."

Tom turned away, fearing he might say something to his uncle for which he should be sorry, and walked silently out of the room.

And now let us do what he never thought of doing—peep over the hedge into the adjoining garden, just beside the nook in which Tom has been meditating, and we shall see a lovely vision. A beautiful young girl is seated on a rustic bench, in the shelter of a bower of roses, idly pinning one in her bosom, while some buds lie on her lap. She is not thinking of the flowers, however, though the fair face is thoughtful, but of the utterances to which she has been an involuntary listener. Presently a smile curves her lips,

to be replaced later by a

slightly contemptuous expression of curiosity. “I must ask Bessie,” is her mental decision, and, just at this moment, a girl somewhat younger than herself, rosy and gay, comes out of the house and approaches.

“What are you thinking about, pensive one?” calls the newcomer, merrily.

“Of your next-door neighbors,” is the smiling rejoinder; “you haven’t told me anything about them.”

Bessie waves her hand in the direction of the tall box-hedge which separates their garden from the Sinclairs’, and says: “Have you seen Tom?”

The young lady addressed smiles. “I don’t know whether it was Tom—but I saw a young man.”

“It must have been he, Amy, for there’s nobody else there but his old uncle and the servants.” Then, assuming a rather sentimental expression, “I wonder whether he remembers me.”

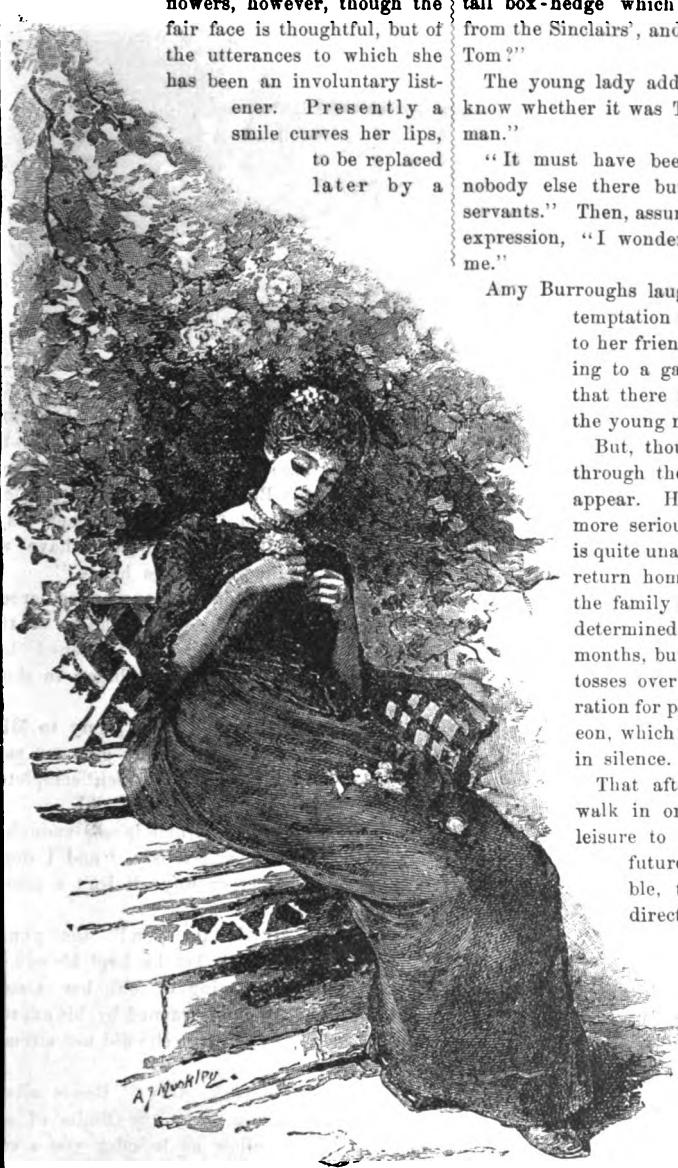
Amy Burroughs laughs. She feels a strong temptation to repeat Tom’s soliloquy to her friend, but resists, and, pointing to a gap in the hedge, suggests that there is an opportunity to test the young man’s memory.

But, though Bessie at once peeps through the opening, Tom does not appear. His mind is occupied with more serious considerations, and he is quite unaware of his old playmate’s return home, after a long absence of the family in Boston. He has fully determined not to wait the two months, but to depart at once, so he tosses over his wardrobe as a preparation for packing, and goes to luncheon, which he shares with his uncle in silence.

That afternoon, Tom went for a walk in order that he might have leisure to mature his plans for the

future, and, after a long ramble, turned his steps in the direction of home just as the

summer sun was sinking slowly in the west. As he neared a bridge that crossed the narrow stream which he had been following, he stopped and waited for the flock of sheep which a man was driving over; while he stood gazing



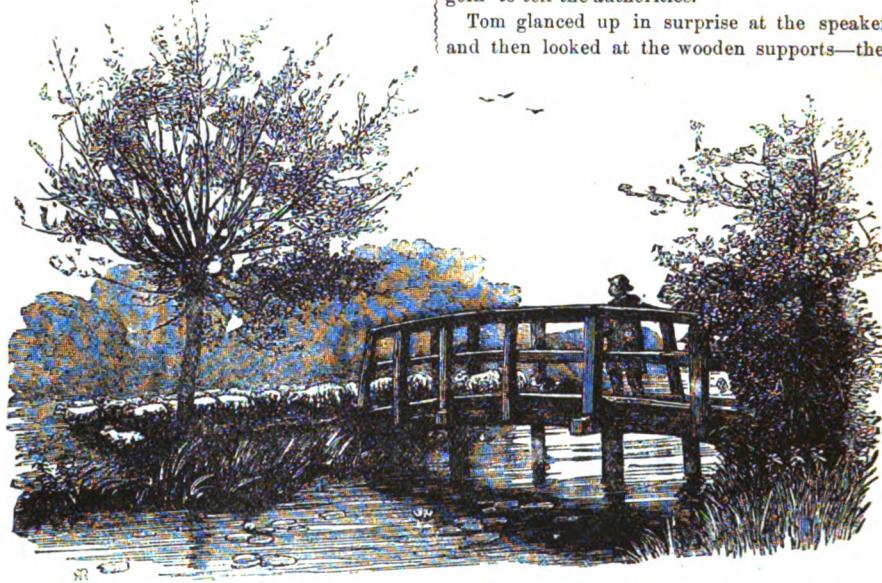
idly about, he noticed a pony-carriage containing two young ladies coming toward the bridge.

As the last sheep passed, and Tom was pre-

paring to hurry over, the man accosted him with:

"That yer bridge thar—'taint very safe. I'm goin' to tell the authorities."

Tom glanced up in surprise at the speaker, and then looked at the wooden supports—they



seemed cracking under the weight they had just borne. In an instant he thought of the carriage, and, hastening on, threw himself in the pony's way. Somewhat astonished, the young girl who was driving reined in.

"I beg your pardon," said Tom, hurriedly, lifting his hat, "but the bridge is unsafe—you must not cross."

"Oh! thank you," cried both occupants of the carriage, together; but the younger of the two showed a slight incredulity in her look, mingled with another expression which Tom did not quite understand.

"The man who just drove those sheep over told me," he explained. "I assure you, the supports are giving away—you must not attempt to drive on."

By this time, Tom had recovered himself sufficiently to notice that one of the ladies was the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld, while the face of the other was strangely familiar.

"This is Mr. Sinclair, is it not?" the latter said. "Have I grown entirely beyond your remembrance?"

There was a mischievous smile arching the lips, which Tom suddenly recognized.

"Why, Bessie—Miss Darragh, I mean!" cried he, cordially grasping the little gloved hand which the holder of the reins leaned from the carriage to give him. "This is unexpected,

but delightful! How are you, and what have you been doing with yourself all these years?"

"Before I account for myself, let me introduce you to Miss Burroughs. In your rescuer, Amy, behold my old friend and former playmate, Mr. Sinclair. Many a game have we played through the gap in the hedge!"

While her two companions exchanged greetings as gracefully as the circumstances of the introduction permitted, Bessie tightened her hold on the reins, for the pony began to show signs of restiveness.

"I am delighted to owe our safety to Miss Darragh's old friend," the lovely girl was saying, with a charming smile which completed Tom's subjugation.

"Oh! I dare say the bridge is safe enough," exclaimed Bessie, mischievously, "and I don't want to drive the other way—it isn't a pretty road."

"There's gratitude for you!" the young man rejoined, laughing; but he kept his eye on the merry girl, knowing of old her almost reckless love of fun, and, warned by his expression that he was in earnest, she did not attempt to go forward.

"Shall we turn back, Amy?" Bessie asked, reluctantly. "I am sorry the limits of our equipage do not allow us to offer you a seat therein," she added, smilingly, to Tom.

"Thanks all the same," he replied, and, after an exchange of farewells, the ladies drove away.

Tom, left to himself, walked home in silence, thinking of a pair of bright eyes, a soft voice, and an enchanting smile. He had seen many pretty girls, but never, it seemed to him, one so beautiful as Miss Burroughs.

That evening, Tom flung his belongings into the drawers again. He had suddenly changed his mind about going away; he would do as his uncle wished—stay awhile. The determining

motive of this resolution, however, he did not admit to himself.

"I shall be glad to see a little of Bessie once more," he reflected.

The following morning, Tom selected for an early saunter the corner of the garden near the opening in the hedge, and was soon rewarded by catching the flutter of feminine garments.

"Good-day, sir," called a merry voice, and Bessie's laughing face appeared, framed in dark-green box.



"The same to you, Miss Darragh," he responded.

"Oh, I'm not Miss Darragh yet—I shan't graduate till next year. I haven't improved a bit, so you needn't be ceremonious! If you should live to be a thousand, I should never think of you as anything but Tom. You haven't much more dignity than I. Now—Amy! By the by, where is Amy?"

But, that young lady not making her appearance, Bessie went on chatting.

"So you have been at school all these years that the house has been closed?" Tom asked.

"Yes, at Madam L'Estrange's. That's where I met Amy. She graduated last year, but she was kind enough to notice me, although I was in a lower class. I adore her."

Tom smiled slightly at this extravagant expression, so very characteristic of his boyhood's friend.

"Why did you not wait until you had finished?" he asked.

"Because Boston did not agree with mamma, the doctors decided. She has not been well all winter. Papa wanted her to go to Newport, but she preferred the quiet of home. I am taking care of her, so Amy was good enough to bury herself in this dull place to keep me company. Wasn't it sweet of her?"

Of course, her listener was quite ready to acquiesce in this verdict.

"How's your uncle?" inquired Bessie, presently.

"Pretty well," answered Tom, hesitatingly, and, just at that moment, Amy's voice was heard.

"Now you'll have to come into our garden in orthodox fashion—no creeping through the hedge," Bessie warned him, laughing as she thought of their youthful pranks. "Amy wouldn't approve."

And, nothing loth, Tom obeyed.

A week later, he was confiding his troubles, as in old days, to his quondam playmate, through the convenient opening between the two gardens. He poured the whole story, with the exception of the heiress's name, into Bessie's sympathizing ear.

"Do you really think the heiress would accept you, if you obeyed your uncle and proposed?" she asked, anxiously.

Tom groaned. He did not wish to appear a coxcomb in Bessie's keen eyes, but he knew too well the favor with which Miss MacDuffy had smiled on him whenever he came in her way. He had fled from New York to escape her wiles.

"Oh! she's so hideous, nobody else would

take her—I'm afraid, undesirable as I am, she'd rather have me than no one. Besides, her father is anxious to secure my uncle's wealth, which he believes I would inherit."

His hearer sighed profoundly.

"Perhaps somebody else with money would do just as well," she suggested, hesitatingly.

"Nobody else with money is likely to want me," laughed Tom.

Then Miss Darragh, being young and giddy, did a foolish thing.

"Have I ever told you," she asked, innocently, "that Miss Burroughs is a great heiress?"

"Indeed—no," said Tom, briefly, his face darkening. "I think my uncle is calling—please excuse me," and, with a slight bow, he hurried into the house, leaving the girl to realize that she had been very silly.

"Now I have done it," she groaned.

For two days, Tom avoided his neighbors, resolving to pack his trunk and depart. But the moth-like instinct urged him to risk his already singed wings, and, at the end of that time, he met Bessie's advances more than half-way. Once within the influence of the unconscious Amy's smiles, he allowed himself to drift happily along. Of course, he, in his present penniless dependent position, was not going to fall in love with an heiress. His first desperate resolution to marry anybody but the "MacDuffy" was quite forgotten. Unfortunately, however, one person remembered it.

Bessie, of course, could not resist confiding Tom's dilemma to Amy, and that young lady, after listening in amused silence, had imparted in return her own information.

"Did you ever tell Mr. Sinclair anything about me?" she asked, carelessly.

Bessie writhed. She had carefully omitted, in this recital, any mention of her unfortunate speech to Tom. Truth, however, compelled her now to confess to her friend, who received her admission in indifferent silence, and then dismissed the subject altogether.

"Woe is me," thought unhappy Bessie. "I suppose I have made matters worse."

But her natural buoyancy enabled her soon to throw off this conviction.

The summer drifted by; a golden summer to Tom, in spite of all his difficulties. The two months were almost at an end, and he had informed his uncle of his unchanged determination. Reluctantly but decidedly, the unhappy young man began to prepare for departure. He resolved to "go out West," the land of hope, to Arizona, where a friend of his was interested in

a silver mine. He could not bear the thought of staying in the East, and, besides, he had been trained to no profession. Out on the confines of civilization, push and energy might avail him something.

He had not yet communicated these plans to his neighbors, so, the day preceding the one on which he had arranged to leave home, he went to bid them good-bye.

The two girls were in the garden as usual.

After a little conversation, Tom remarked:

"What's the matter with your gardener? That vine needs attention badly, and the grass is very long."

"Yes, I know," rejoined Bessie; "but James has the rheumatism. I must get someone to attend to the lawn. The vine—now—if you were of any use, you might help me fasten it up."

She laughed as she spoke in her usual saucy fashion.

"Why, of course, I'll do it," cried Tom.

Before commencing, however, he managed to inform the girls of his intended departure.

Bessie was loud in her regret. In reply to her incessant questions, Tom explained his views and plans, and it was evident that he was very much in earnest. Amy listened with little apparent interest. At last she rose and begged to be excused, declaring that she must write a letter to send by the afternoon mail.

"I won't be gone very long," she said, apologetically, to Bessie, who scarcely concealed a frown.

That young person was gradually growing desperate. All her cherished hopes and plans seemed in danger of ruin. To the eyes of youth, present failure appears always final. She suddenly formed a reckless determination, flinging all scruples away.

Hammer and knife in hand, Tom was battling with an obstreperous branch, gazing in the direction of Amy's retreat. Grasping the bag of garden-tools nervously in one hand, Bessie laid her other lightly on Tom's arm. He turned in some surprise.

"Leave that stupid old vine alone, Tom, and talk to me," she said, pleadingly.

"What do you want me to tell you?" he asked, gloomily. "You must know that I have nothing to offer a poor girl, much less an heiress."

"Tom," began Bessie, in a determined tone, "I told you Amy was an heiress, didn't I?"

"Yes," he said, in some surprise.

"Well—I—I—Tom—Amy hasn't a cent in the world. I—it was one of my jokes."

"Are you sure, Bessie?" Tom laid his hand on her arm, and looked into her eyes.

"Quite sure, Tom," she answered, boldly. Then, whispering "I will send her to you," she hurried toward the house.

Tom had scarcely recovered from his stupefaction when he saw Miss Burroughs approaching.

After an instant's silence he began, in a hurried impetuous manner: "There is something I would like to say to you, Miss Amy, before I go. As long as I thought you an heiress, I did not dare to speak; but now I feel that I must. I have nothing to offer you but the love of my whole heart. Perhaps I have no right to tell you this, since that is all I could give; but I am going very far away, and, if I could even hope that you would hold me in kindly remembrance, I should try my best to win something worth offering a woman, though not what would be your due."

He had spoken rapidly, never stopping, for fear his emotion might overwhelm him.

Varying shades of feeling passed over Amy Burroughs's face, as she listened in silence to Tom's words.

"I should have gone away and never spoken, thinking you very rich; but, a moment ago, Bessie said it had been one of her jokes—that you had not a penny. Ah! Amy—"

But he was interrupted.

"I thought your uncle wanted you to marry an heiress? That you were willing to marry anyone except your uncle's choice?" Miss Burroughs softly said.

"That was before I saw you," Tom answered, simply. A sudden hope had wakened in his heart.

"If you are willing to take me without a fortune, I am yours," she murmured, and his answer was to fold her in his arms.

They had hardly returned to a sense of the proprieties when Bessie appeared. As she neared the happy couple, Miss Burroughs eyed her curiously.

"Forgive me—forgive me," the young girl cried. "I didn't exactly tell a story, for you haven't a penny yourself, Amy! But, Tom, she is, alas, an heiress! Still," she went on, quickly, "I am not at all sorry—not at all. You two would never have settled things if I hadn't interfered. Confess!"

Tom went out West and prospered, though not phenomenally; but, when he came home three years later, and married the heiress to the Burroughs estate, Mr. Sinclair, senior, was quite reconciled to the match. And Bessie never regretted her interference.